

A
A
0
0
1
4
2
6
2
1
5
8



UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Ex Libris

C. K. OGDEN

**IMPROVE
YOUR DICTION
AND VOICE PRODUCTION**



IMPROVE
YOUR DICTION
AND VOICE PRODUCTION

BY
ZOË RORKE CREE
L.R.A.M., L.G.S.M. (Eloc.)

With a Foreword by
KATE RORKE

LONDON

W. FOULSHAM & CO. LIMITED
NEW YORK TORONTO CAPETOWN SYDNEY

MADE IN GREAT BRITAIN
PRINTED BY TONBRIDGE PRINTERS LIMITED
PEACH HALL WORKS, TONBRIDGE, KENT
COPYRIGHT: W. FOUNDMAN & CO., LTD.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
FOREWORD	7
I THE ADVANTAGES OF A GOOD VOICE	11
II HOW YOUR VOICE IS MADE ..	15
III BREATH CONTROL	20
IV TONE	27
V DICTION (ENUNCIATION AND ARTICULATION)	32
VI EXPRESSION	41
VII READING AND THE MUSIC OF WORDS	50
VIII GESTURE	62
XI HOW TO TRAIN FOR THE STAGE ..	71
X HINTS ON VOICE TRAINING EXERCISES	81

FOREWORD

As speech has brought in its train everything that we call civilization, it is obviously necessary that we should speak our words to their best advantage ; not only by giving to each its true and proper meaning and by stringing them together in recognized forms, but by speaking them in such a way that the listener hears without effort and with ease of understanding.

It is surprising how we endure bad speech. I do not mean the slang, but the bad articulation, the neglected consonants, the faulty emphasis, the dreary monotony, or the gabbled indistinctness of so many. A good voice is one of the greatest assets a man or woman can possess, yet how often it is allowed to degenerate and become an irritation through a lack of knowledge of how best to use it.

The power of speech is not so much a gift

as is generally supposed. Provided the matter is there, the artistry of delivery is everything and can be acquired by a study of elocution and by practice. We all know how a fine speaker can sway his audience, whilst a poor one at best sends us empty away, although the matter of his speech may be the better reasoned.

In her little book, my daughter deals with the technical details and additions that are so necessary for effective speaking, whether by the orator, the lecturer, the priest or the actor, or by the ordinary individual who wishes to impart a good story to his friends.

That there has been a great improvement in speech during the last few years, since the study of elocution is gradually extending, is obvious. Elocution as a study is still in its infancy though, and one as yet is shocked far too often by its neglect or misuse in the theatre, lecture hall or pulpit. How many of us, unfortunately, have seen a theatrical situation frittered away and its point lost by the neglect of a study of elocution on the part of

the actor? Do we always completely understand and appreciate the lessons as read in church or the sermon as delivered? The meaning of many a lecture is lost to us through the bad diction of the lecturer. The political speaker is not always eloquent, however well reasoned are the things he says; noise is not oratory, nor are 'ums' and 'ahs' good punctuation.

In this book my daughter has endeavoured to point out the ways as known to an elocutionist of how speech as an art may be acquired. It is not a textbook in which to find a panacea of every elocutionary ill. She has written it more as an introduction and help to those who appreciate the power of speech and are desirous of attaining the best results in themselves.

Thali B. B. B.



IMPROVE YOUR DICTION AND VOICE PRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

THE ADVANTAGES OF A GOOD VOICE

TO listen to a clear, melodious voice gives pleasure to all. Yet in the course of my work I have occasionally met people who are entirely satisfied with their own voices. Some have had lisps, others an inability to pronounce the letter "R", or have had a sing-song intonation ; be the defect what it may they are content and even proud of it. It seems to be considered more insulting to be told that you have an ugly voice than that your appearance is plain and your nose not in the middle of your face. Perhaps the insult lies in the insinuation that we have not tried to improve. We cannot change our fea-

tures so have to put up with them, while we can and should improve our voices.

It is not only the barrister, the actor and the lecturer who need to cultivate a good voice—though even the members of these professions do not always admit the necessity—but the business man with letters to dictate, the salesman or saleswoman, the telephonist, all indeed whose voice is part of their stock-in-trade, would admit the advantage of a *tireless* voice, would welcome any remedy for the sore throat and breathlessness of which so many complain. A tireless voice means a properly produced voice, and a properly produced voice means good tone and clear speech.

More employers and examiners are influenced by a clear well-toned voice than they, themselves, realize. So often the voice is taken to be the expression of character. Such a view may not always be just; yet hard, clear cut words are often the sign of the clear, calculating brain; mumbling, half-formed words hint at vagueness of thought, while harsh, metallic tones betray a self-

assertive personality difficult to work with. It is therefore to our advantage to cultivate a pleasing voice, either as a cloak for, or an expression of, our character.

In the course of this little book we shall discuss the qualities of a good voice, the tireless voice ; how it is built up, on what it depends, and how much it depends on our own efforts. We have a voice if we are physically normal, and if we are mentally normal we have the power to control, alter and form it. It may not be that by our own efforts we can become a second Melba or Bernhardt ; but most certainly we can make the best of what we have. No one is born with a discordant voice, even though through habit or environment such may have been acquired. Always "habit is overcome by habit," and we are never too old nor too bad to improve. If we try to find out our faults and their causes, or, which is a safer and quicker method, get some experienced teacher of elocution to tell us our mistakes and put us on the right road to cure them, it should be but the matter of a few

14 ELOCUTION AND VOICE PRODUCTION

months before we notice the change. A nasal twang, a tired throat, or the most stubborn lisp may be cured by a few simple exercises ; but it should be borne in mind that the ultimate improvement rests with ourselves. Even the best teacher in the world cannot take our voice and mould it as a sculptor moulds his clay ; we must be prepared to work, practise and co-operate if we desire success.

CHAPTER II

HOW YOUR VOICE IS MADE

HUMAN speech is so common a gift that few pause to consider the complex mechanism that it sets in motion.

Sound, we know, is produced by vibration. The more rapid the vibrations the higher is the pitch of the sound. Some vibrations are so rapid that the pitch will be above the range of human hearing. This we can easily test by listening to the sound of an adjustable electric fan. At its highest speed the fan will probably be inaudible, but if the pace is decreased a humming sound is heard, which becomes definitely lower in pitch as the speed of the fan slackens.

In the human voice these vibrations occur in the larynx (commonly called the Adam's Apple), a delicate, intricate mechanism made up of cartilage and muscle and situated at the

top of the windpipe, which leads from the lungs. Through the larynx the expired breath has to pass, vibrating the taut edges of the glottis slit as it does so. These edges are called the vocal cords, and through the control of an elaborate system of muscles may be made tense or relaxed, may be separated or approximated according to the pitch of the tone required.

The pitch of the speaking voice, except on rare occasions of emotional excitement, lies within the compass of an octave. But it is important to realize that beyond thinking and willing a high-pitched note or a low-pitched note we cannot consciously control the movements of the vocal cords. Indeed, to *think* of the vocal cords generally means to stiffen the muscles of the larynx, which is excessively harmful. All we can consciously do is to regulate the amount of air we allow to pass between the vocal cords and to direct it into the various resonance chambers.

Therefore we may say that breath is the motive power of voice production, since it is

by the expiring breath that the vocal cords are made to vibrate. A clear, unwavering tone largely depends on a steady stream of breath passing through the larynx. If you have ever been in a country church where the bellows of the organ are still worked by a village blower, you will know what queer shrieks and groans result if the blower turns to greet a friend and does not keep up the steady flow of air through the instrument. In the human voice our lungs are the bellows which, by the expulsion and contraction of the chest are filled or emptied of air during respiration. It is obviously essential that the lungs should be able to expand freely and easily, and that the voice-user should be able to control and regulate the breath stream; otherwise the same inequality and jerkiness of sound will result as when the village blower is distracted from his job. We shall consider in more detail in the following chapter how this control is most easily gained.

Speech is the result of three distinct processes: sound production, tone production or

resonance, and actual word formation or diction.* We have seen how sound has its motive power in the expiring breath stream, and is produced at various pitches by the vibrations of the vocal cords in the larynx caused by this stream of breath. Yet sound and pitch are but a third of the complete whole; the greater part of the work is done above the larynx. These three processes will be realized if we intone the word "bring" and watch the movements of our mouths in a mirror. We notice first that we can intone the word "bring" in different pitches, high or low, but that even so it has quite a different tone from such a word as "dead." For, whereas "bring" is directed by the breath stream to the resonance chambers in the head, "dead" has a fuller, deeper sound and is resonated in the mouth and throat.†

Let us now look in the mirror and whisper the

*The word *diction* throughout this book is used to denote the enunciation and articulation of words rather than the choice of words.

†The resonance chambers will be described in Chapter III.

two words ; our lips and tongue move differently in each word, forming quite different shapes. We notice also that, when whispered, both words have one even pitch ; that is, we have sound and diction but no resonance.

It is in the perfection of these three processes, whether used in speech or song, that true beauty of voice lies. Few indeed are perfect in all three. It is the work of the elocution teacher to recognize in which particular the student errs. It may be that the diction is blurred and indistinct though the tone is excellent, as is the case with a great number of singers whose words are absolutely unintelligible ; again the words may be clear but the tone hard, nasal or grating, as with the pronounced form of cockney twang ; or both words and tone may be good, but the student pauses and gasps for breath, or his words flow on in irritating monotony. All these faults are very common, yet none of them is insurmountable. We will take each process separately and see where lie the chief pitfalls and wherein lies perfection.

CHAPTER III

BREATH CONTROL

IN the preceding chapter we have seen how necessary it is that the expansion of the lungs should be regular and controlled so as to allow an even flow of breath through the larynx. This control is especially necessary to the actor, preacher, lecturer and public speaker, for whom the elocution teacher chiefly works, as they have, by the nature of their occupation, to deliver long, complicated speeches, to make their voice travel great distances, and to be able to vary tone, pitch and rate at any moment.

The first thing to observe is whether our breath control is hampered by a lack of freedom of movement. Is there any tightness or constraint? Are we standing or sitting easily?

If, when speaking, we stand or sit in a

huddled or constrained position it is obvious that the lungs will not have room for free expansion. Consequently there will be greater strain on the voice, which should rise easily upon the breath, and the effort to gain power and tone by other unnatural means will probably result in a sore throat. When sitting we should be upright but with no tension or effort ; when standing the feet should be firm, and slightly apart, and the knees pressed back ; but above the waist there should be perfect freedom of movement and no stiffness in moving the arms or holding up the head. The air will then flow in to fill the lungs as the chest expands, easily, quickly and freely.

If we breathe deeply and place our hands on our chest and sides we feel the upward movement of the ribs and the general expansion of the chest sideways and from front to back ; as we breathe out there is a natural recoil and relaxation of the muscles. The aim of the voice user is to make that recoil as slow and as even as he can. In breathing, while at rest, inspiration takes roughly the same length of

time as expiration ; but when using the voice inspiration must be as deep and as rapid as possible, and expiration slow and sustained, so as to use every particle of the outgoing breath to produce sound. If we breathe in again and then pull in and tense slightly the muscles of the abdominal wall, we find that this gives a steadiness and support to the voice. A few deep breaths thus, intoning the sounds "oo—ah" on the outgoing breath will prove to many how wavering is their control. Daily repetition of this while mentally counting six, then ten or more, will prove a helpful exercise, and by degrees we shall find that we can keep a steady flow of sound for a comparatively long period.

There has been much discussion in recent years on the best methods of breathing for elocution. It is not within the compass of this book to discuss the various merits and demerits of the methods advocated. All that is necessary is that the speaker should be able to take a deep even breath, silently, and without raising the shoulders ; and to let his

breath out again slowly and steadily through the nose or mouth.

Breathlessness in the speaker or singer is ugly at any time, but particularly so on the wireless. Its chief cause is an attempt to continue to use the voice after the breath is exhausted. This may be shown by a constant lowering and blurring of the voice at the end of sentences, by a squeak or jerk of the voice, and in singing by a tremolo. The voice-user will frequently complain of a sore throat. "Clergyman's sore-throat," as it is termed, is primarily due to thus continuing to speak after the lungs are emptied; in the clergymen's case a secondary cause is speaking with the head back and the chin raised so that the larynx is held in a strained position.

The cure for this breathlessness lies in correct phrasing. Phrasing means to cut up the sentences according to the sense, making short breath pauses whenever the sense allows. In the following example, taken from William Hazlitt's essay "My First Acquaintance with Poets", by marking the slight pauses thus /

and those when a rapid breath may be taken thus //, we shall see how easily the sentence may be read, whereas it would be almost impossible to read it in one breath as far as the full stop.

“My father was a Dissenting minister at Wem, / in Shropshire, // and in the year 1798 // (the figures that compose the date, are to me like the “dreaded name of Demogorgon”) // Mr. Coleridge came to Shrewsbury / to succeed Mr. Rowe in the spiritual charge of a United congregation there.

“He did not come till late on the Saturday afternoon before he was to preach, // and Mr. Rowe, // who himself went down to the coach / in a state of anxiety and expectation / to look for the arrival of his successor, could find no one at all answering the description / but a round-faced man in a short black coat // (like a shooting-jacket) // which hardly seemed to have been made for him, // but who seemed to be talking at a great rate to his fellow-passengers.”

In both these two sentences it will be noticed that the breath-pauses frequently coincide

with the punctuation mark. It is part of the work of the comma to give the reader a clue as to where the sense will allow him to take breath. But in the second part of the example, in particular, there are quite long passages without any comma or other stop, and in these it is left to the reader to make such pauses as he needs and the sense allows.

Bad phrasing is usually caused by nervousness or by carelessness. In the first case one can only say—speak slowly, take your time ; but in the second the carelessness is shown in that the reader or actor has not troubled to find the real meaning of the words he is saying. His mind rushes ahead, grasping only a vague outline of the sense, delaying to pause till the full stop. When we speak our own thoughts in ordinary conversation, we seldom become breathless, because we so thoroughly know the meaning of what we say, and subconsciously phrase correctly for ourselves. In learning a part, therefore, the actor or actress should examine carefully the meaning so as to make the speech his or her own ; and get the full value of

the sense. This is generally what is meant by "getting into the atmosphere of a part," about which we shall have more to say in the chapter on Expression. But we can easily understand the significance of phrasing by taking such a well-known speech as the soliloquy in "Hamlet" (Act III, Scene I), "To be or not to be . . ." as spoken by a good professional actor, and contrasting his interpretation with that of the average school child. A good professional actor, by his phrasing and expression, brings out different shades of meaning, though still keeping the flow of the verse; the child has learnt it, and repeats it—as thirty-five lines.

CHAPTER IV

TONE

THE next process to consider in voice production is the quality of tone—or resonance. Resonance is the “re-sounding” and amplifying of the initial sound ; and it is on the correct placing and shaping of the voice in the resonance chambers that the quality, and to a large extent the power, of vocal tone depend.

By the vibration of two small bands, such as are the vocal cords, the actual sound made in the larynx is feeble and “flat,” having no carrying power. The voice owes all depth and richness of tone colour to the resounding and shaping to which it is subjected above the larynx.

When a tuning fork is struck and passed over a table or other resistant surface, the sound, which is but the continued vibrations of the air, hits against the hard surface and is “re-sounded,” that is, reinforced and prolonged by

reflection from the resistant surface. If the fork is then moved away the sound is immediately lessened.

If after striking the tuning fork, it is passed over a specially constructed resonance-box, for instance a violin, and the butt end of the tuning fork is actually brought into contact with it, the sound is greatly increased in volume and in quality according to the construction of the resonance-box. The vibrations set up by the tuning-fork are now increased not only by reflexion, but also by the vibrating air inside the violin, as well as the vibration of the violin itself.

Thus in the human voice the vibrating breath leaving the larynx hits against the palatal arch, or is directed into the hollow bones of the head, which are specially constructed amplifiers, and by so doing is resonated and gains in tone and power.

The chief vocal resonance chambers are the mouth (hard palate and gums), the nasal and frontal cavities (head-resonators), the throat, and, in certain tones, the chest. The vocalised

breath may be directed into these resonators at will. For instance, we should hear the head resonance when intoning the word "king," or when humming. Certain words require more head resonance, others have the flatter resonance of the mouth, but in the fullest speech tones there should be a harmony, a controlled and apt use of all resonators, which will give the voice depth, richness and softness.

The resonance chamber, over which we have most control, is the mouth, since, by the movement of the tongue, lips and jaw we can alter its size and shape, and in so doing the quality of the resonance. By thus altering the shape we produce a series of distinct resonant sounds which are called vowels; thus the mouth is often termed by elocutionists the "vowel chamber," and it is held that if our vowel sounds are shaped and placed correctly, our tone will be good. This is rather at variance with the views of some teachers who state that the vowels are formed in the larynx. If we consider the elaborate shaping which each vowel form undergoes in the mouth we shall realize that "formation

in the larynx " is not strictly correct, though it is true that each vowel sound has a distinct pitch of its own, and pitch is largely decided in the larynx.

We find, therefore, that good tone is based on two factors: correct placing, which is resonance, and correct shaping, which is control of the organs of articulation. Ugly toned voices are due, therefore, to a wrong use of the resonance chambers, or to the muffling or veiling of the sound by bad shaping in the vowel chamber.

It is important to realize that, though tone is directed by our sense of hearing, faulty tones cannot be corrected by "ear" alone, but depend on the right movement of our tongue, lips and soft palate (the shaping of the vowel chamber), controlled by the sense of touch. This will be readily understood when the intricate movements of the tongue are considered in the next chapter.

Some common faults due to incorrect placing need to be considered. A nasal twang generally means that the throat and back of the

nose are used as the chief resonators, the true head-resonance and the mouth hardly being used at all. A throaty tone, as its name implies, means that the voice is being thrown back into the throat, and the soft palate used as the chief resonator. A metallic tone is given by directing the voice forward against the hard palate only. The effect of this, though "brilliant," tends to be harsh, as it lacks the deeper harmonies.

Our ideal is to use each and every resonance chamber in due proportion according to the words and meaning. Perfect resonance will ensure a whisper being heard over an entire theatre, and will allow for a rapid and varied change of tone and pitch without any conscious effort.

CHAPTER V

DICTION

(ENUNCIATION AND ARTICULATION)

As we have seen in the preceding chapter, good tone depends as much on the control of the organs of articulation as upon resonance. We do not pretend to be good pianists because we happen to possess a grand piano, but admit that a knowledge of technique, and the exercise and control of the muscles of the hand are necessary before we can hope to draw beautiful music from it. It is just as essential before we can draw beautiful music from the instrument of our voice that we should exercise and strengthen the organs of articulation, particularly the tongue.

Let us take a mirror and examine these organs for ourselves. First come the lips ; we see their use in forming such consonants as " b," " v," and in shaping the vowel sound " oo." Next come the teeth and gums used

in conjunction with the tongue to form "*th*(in) " and "*th*(ere)." Behind the teeth we have the roof of the mouth or hard palate, against which is trilled the letter "r"; this terminates at the back in a movable curtain of membrane, the soft palate and uvula, which with the tongue form the hard consonants "k" and "g." On the floor of the mouth is the tongue, a delicately adjusted group of muscles, capable of moving in all directions, as well as of altering its shape. By the movement of the tongue in conjunction with the two palates and the teeth are made all articulate sounds, except those of the consonants "p," "b," "m," "f," "v," which are formed by the movement of the lips.

The importance of the tongue cannot be too much stressed. It is helpful, therefore, to know something of the construction of this organ and its control.

Speech, as shown in Chapter II, is the result of three processes, sound production, tone production and articulation. It is during the two last processes that the tongue plays an

important part ; being made up of two sets of muscles, the intrinsic and the extrinsic, one set governing articulation, and the other greatly modifying the clearness and quality of tone.

The tongue itself is composed of muscle fibres arranged in such a way that by their contraction or relaxation, together or in part, they can alter the shape of the tongue at will. Thus by the flexibility and dexterity of movement which they give they allow for the rapid change of sound formations in speech. These are the intrinsic muscles.

The extrinsic muscles are those which connect the tongue with fixed points, and allow of our moving the tongue as a whole, such as in protrusion, drawing back, or moving laterally. They also, by keeping the throat free and open, allow the vibrating air to be directed at will into the nasal or mouth resonance chambers, with a consequent fullness of sound.

These two sets of muscles meet and are controlled at the focal point, just under the

tip of the tongue. Therefore it is to be noted that the tongue is controlled from the tip and not from the root. If we wish to flatten the tongue, for such a purpose as to look at the throat, for instance, we shall find it quite simple if we start to flatten from the tip, while we shall need the aid of a spoon, or a tongue depresser if we try to flatten the back portion only. Any attempt to stiffen the back of the tongue throws considerable strain on the throat and larynx and results in a sore throat. It is this type of sore or tired throat that results when the intrinsic muscles are weak, or improperly used. In speaking or singing under these conditions, extra effort is used to supply the lack of power; this often causes strain and rigidity of the extrinsic muscles, harmful to the voice and tiring to the speaker.

It is to the strengthening of the muscles that we must devote our efforts, for, to a "flabby" tongue—that is one in which the intrinsic muscles are not sufficiently strong and controlled—is due the majority of speech

faults, from the pronounced lisp to the inability to articulate certain letters, "r," "th," for instance, or simply to a difficulty in speaking rapidly with clearness.

The qualities of clear speech which depend largely on the control of the tongue are distinctness and accuracy of sound, firmness and fluency.

But before discussing these four qualities it may be as well to define the meaning of certain words technically used by the elocutionist with a narrower meaning than that conveyed in ordinary conversation.

A *vowel* sound is a free open sound formed, without contact of the organs of articulation, by the shaping in the mouth of the initial sound made by the vibrations in the larynx.

A *consonant* sound is formed when there is contact of two of these organs of articulation, for instance, the tongue and palate as in "l," or the lower lip and teeth as in "v," and therefore there is, in a sense, a stoppage of the free issue of sound.

Also for the sake of simplicity we will take

the word "*enunciation*" to mean the shaping of the vowel sounds, and "*articulation*" to mean the formation of the consonant sounds.

To return to the four qualities of clear speech. Professor Millard in his "Grammar of Elocution" (Section I) gives a very apt definition of them, thus—"Accuracy requires the articulation to be formed by contact of the proper organs"; "Distinctness is due to the neatness of that contact"; "Firmness consists in the power with which sounds are formed"; and "Fluency is the easy transition from one articulation to another without break in the syllabic impulse."

Therefore since accuracy requires the contact of the proper organs, an inaccuracy would be to substitute one consonant for another thus, saying, "My muvver bwrought me to Yondon" for "My mother brought me to London." In this sentence the lip sound "v" has been substituted for the "th" sound formed by the tongue and teeth. The trilled "r" made with the tongue against the hard palate, is conveyed by a lip movement

not unlike the "w" in "war"; while for "l," another tongue and palate formed consonant, is substituted a throaty sound made by the soft palate and back of the tongue, with a broadening of the tongue at the tip.

In indistinct articulation, though the actual organs used may be correct, there is frequently an additional movement, generally with the lips, which is quite unnecessary. For example, the lips will be protruded and moved for such purely tongue and palate consonants as "sh" and "ch," and the speaker is said to "mouth his lines," making many unnecessary grimaces.

A want of firmness is perhaps the most common fault. It is shown in a feeble blurring, or even an omission of the final consonant endings. "The wind and hail rattled at the window pane like ghostly hands," will become "Th' win' an' hail rattle' a' th' win'ow pane li' ghos'ly han's."

Fluency, which in its perfection is the easy transition from one articulate sound to another, or from one vowel sound to another,

means a clear rapidity of speech which is far from easy to acquire. The opposite to fluency is a slurring of the words into each other, as "re' tape" for "red tape," "r'inforce" for "reinforce," "your reye" for "your eye."

That these qualities depend largely on the strength and control of the tongue will be readily understood when we realize how inaccuracy, indistinctness, feebleness, and lack of fluency are due to the weakness of the intrinsic muscles. In the inaccuracies taken as an example we see how, in each case, the consonants "th," "r," and "l," all formed with the tip of the tongue, are changed into lip consonants or articulations where strength in the tip of the tongue is not required. In the same way the "mouthing" which gives indistinctness is a sub-conscious effort to give power to sounds which the tongue has not strength to articulate properly. Lack of firmness is obviously lack of strength, and for fluency the intrinsic muscles must be strong and under control, so that the sounds do not drag

or blur, but are swift and neat. Thus all who desire proficiency should strengthen the tongue *at the tip* by means of a few simple exercises, and perseveringly practise such consonant sounds as they find difficult. For it is the power and accuracy with which the consonants are articulated which make the speaker heard. Consonants may be said to "cut the air before the vowel"; for whereas the vowels give depth and music, the consonants give character and meaning to our words.

CHAPTER VI

EXPRESSION

CORRECTNESS of production alone is not perfection. Even the richest tones and the clearest diction may be unsatisfying, for beauty lies in variety.

Why is it that when certain of our acquaintances visit us we stifle a yawn, and try, without success, to keep our thoughts from wandering? How often when we are "listening in" to a British broadcasting lecturer, whose subject is of great interest to us, whose words are clear, well-chosen and precise, do we heave a sigh of relief at the end? Alas, how many sermons have left us nodding in our pews! It is this demon of monotony that will mar the best voice and make wearisome the most soul-stirring matter.

We find its cause in two opposite extremes of elocution: no variation at all, or too much

variation. Personally I have yet to meet the speaker who remains on one dead level of tone throughout an entire speech. Usually monotony comes from the constant repetition of some rise or fall of inflection. It may be a habit of dropping the voice at the end of every sentence, or at every breath pause; inversely it may be a trick, acquired perhaps in trying to cure this, of meaninglessly lifting the voice at every pause or stop. Both faults give a very sing-song and monotonous effect, and generally succeed in lulling the listener into inattention.

The other irritating form of monotony is too much variation or over-emphasis.

" Give me *some* music,
Music, moody food of us that *trade in* love."
 (ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA)

Perhaps so jerky a delivery would hardly be associated with monotony, a word with a somewhat sleepy sound in it, but by the constant repetition of emphasis all meaning is lost quite as surely as by using no emphasis at all, and

the same sense of lack of variation is produced on the hearer.

To avoid monotony and gain expression I can do no better than quote my mother's golden rule, which is so familiar to all her pupils; "As your thought changes so your voice changes. Put your brains in your mouth and your thoughts in your lips." The essential difference between the actor who is only word-perfect, and the actor who has also got into the atmosphere of the play lies in this : that while one repeats the part parrot-fashion while his thoughts are elsewhere, and consequently carries no conviction, the other puts expression into his work, letting his thoughts follow the mood of the character, making the words his own ; and therefore his voice will change quite naturally with every change of mood—he will be living the part.

The same test applies to every public speaker. The speaker who reads his speech, the speaker who speaks from notes, and the extemporary speaker, all have a different hold on the audience. The extemporary speaker, if he has

a ready wit and a quick flow of words, will be most effective, the speaker who uses notes will probably be the most accurate; the speaker who reads his speech will be in grave danger of boring his hearers unless he has a very practised delivery. A speech repeated too often becomes stale and mechanical, because the brain is no longer behind the words and the speech ceases to impress. "Put your brains in your mouth and your thoughts in your lips." More will be said of this in Chapter VII. It implies getting the full value out of the words themselves. In practice it makes all the difference between the accomplished actor's rendering of "Hamlet" and the school-child's repetition; it gives all the subtle variations between actor and actor, by which each portrays a new aspect of Hamlet, another depth of beauty in the verse, a different shade of meaning in the words.

We can vary our speech in several ways, by change of tone, pitch, rate and inflection (which is the slide upwards or downwards of the voice from note to note) according to the emotion

portrayed. If the emotion is one of intense excitement or fear the tone will tend to be discordant, the pitch high, the inflections strained—often the voice will rise where normally it should fall—and the rate of speech will be hurried. In despondency the tones will be flat, the pitch low, the inflections normal, though tending to have a cynical twist in them, the rate slow . . . and so on. To some perhaps such an analysis will seem a wholly unnecessary splitting of hairs ; but the majority of beginners are the better at first for studying a part technically, for it is often an aid to finding the key to an otherwise obscure character, though once having found the key, all mechanical technicalities are best forgotten while the actor “ lives in the part.” A knowledge of technique is meant to help and not to hinder our progress, and, provided that we do not become enveloped in it, will give us an assurance such as no amount of natural ability will produce. Natural ability alone, without the reinforcement of technique, is a frail thing to trust to when facing an audience.

To the monotonous speaker, therefore, it should prove useful to study some of the rules of inflection. As has been noted, inflection is the slide up or down of the voice from one note to the other, by which so many shades of meaning may be conveyed in a few words. Inflection may be said to have three movements—

A simple fall marked thus \searrow ;

A simple rise marked thus $/$ and

A compound of the two marked thus \vee
or thus \wedge

A simple falling inflection is used when the sense is complete ; for example " The old man sleeps."

The simple rising inflection is used when the sense is not complete ; for instance " He will go wherever you wish." " We not only motored through Sússex, but through Kent as well." Or when asking a real question. " Are you coming?" " Yès." The sense is not completed till the answer is given. Simple rising and falling inflections may be balanced against each other to strengthen the

effect of antithesis such as "To bé, or nòt to be. . . ." "Homer was the greater mán, Virgil the better artist." But with the most varied use of simple inflections, it is obvious that they do not give scope for the more subtle modulations of the speaking voice. Here are used the compound inflections, which are a blending of the rising and falling in one word. These occur in cases of doubt, insincerity or irony, and at all times when the sense implies more than the literal words convey. For an example take the answer to a simple question:—

"Are you comíng?" "Yés" (definitely).

"Are you comíng?" "Yés, if you are"
(a qualification).

"Are you comíng?" "Yés" (uncertainty).

The last "Yes" implies more than the simple statement.

It is these compound inflections which give power and meaning to such lines as those spoken by Shylock in the Merchant of Venice.

"Oh, sir, you are wonderous condescending,
 What should I say to you? Should I
 not say
 Hath a dog money? Is it possible
 A cur can lend three thousand ducats?"

Numerous variations can also be made by altering the rate of speech and the pitch of the voice. A whisper may be more effective than a shout; and it is easy to realize that, generally speaking, the effect of a soliloquy would be lost if taken at top speed.

Enough has been said to show that variations are not only a possibility, but a necessity in speech, before the full meaning of the words can be conveyed. A helpful practice is to read aloud, choosing a wide variety of subject matter in prose, verse and drama. While reading we should try to get into the mood of the author or character, getting the right atmosphere, giving lightness of tone or heaviness, rapidity of speech or slowness, simplicity of inflection or subtlety, yet with all, never losing that underlying rhythm of both poetry

and prose. By these means all tendency to monotony and over-emphasis will disappear, and our voices may be said to be in "tune" with the matter we are reading.

CHAPTER VII

READING AND THE MUSIC OF WORDS

NOWADAYS few books are written to be read aloud ; yet language was made for speaking. To human beings alone in creation is given the power to express to others their thoughts, their hopes, their fears, that each may add his quota to the sum of life's experience.

Self-expression is the crown of man's gifts ; it is also his most urgent need. Yet, in the modern rush of life, books and papers are written to be glanced at, to give news, or information, or sensation quickly, to "get right home" in the pithiest manner possible ; little indeed is written to be spoken. It is left to the lover of words, whether writing in prose or verse, to treasure their beauty, and to keep burnished the rich English language lest it should rust in a scabbard of colloquial slang like a useless sword.

It is for us, the everyday people of England, to fight for our inheritance, and we can do this by guarding our own speech from becoming a meaningless slang, and by learning to appreciate the beauty within our grasp. This beauty we find in the writings of those who are themselves appreciative and who know how to paint with words in rich colourings.

Only those who have experimented can know the pleasure that lies in the sound of words. In an issue of the *Poetry Review* appeared verses, from which the following is an extract :—

There are lovely words :

One is Merciful :

It is like brook water

Falling slow and cool,

It is like a cold hand

Over burning eyes,

It is like still music

Before the flute dies.

.

Words are like bright butterflies
Above the wheat-yield ;
Words are like thick snow
Hiding a scarred field ;
Words are sweet to say
Softly underbreath . . .
There are lovely words—
One is Death.

This is not great poetry, but it was obviously written by one conscious of word music ; it is inconceivable to think of it as read, not spoken.

Words gain their power and their beauty from the very sound they make in speech ; thus “ mellow ” is a more pleasant sounding word than “ shrill ” ; and they gain from the associations they bring to our mind ; thus we might prefer “ sunshine ” to “ mud.” Let us experiment with two similar words such as “ moon-light ” and “ moon-lit.” If we ask people to say what “ moon-light ” conveys to their minds, the majority will give a vague, shadowy answer “ a seascape,” “ a quiet

night scene," "diffused light," and so on; while "moon-lit" will be more definite: "something lit up," a "bright reflected light," etc. The difference lies in the words "light" and "lit" and their difference in the long and short vowel sounds. "Light" gives a vague, broad, sustained sound, while "lit" with its short vowel and sharp "t" is more clear cut. An artist in words, such as was Milton or Keats, knows this at least subconsciously, and therefore changes, alters, polishes his work until the right sound tallies with the mental image he is trying to convey.

Before we can truly appreciate such of our great writers as Shakespeare, Jane Austen, or Conrad, we must have heard the rhythm of their harmony, as well as followed it in print; for it requires a highly trained inward ear to be able to enjoy all their beauty through sight alone. Reading aloud is an art that has almost entirely disappeared. An appeal to the sight has superseded sound as a form of expression, as modern advertising methods and the cinema and television show.

However, even the best pictures are inadequate without words as well, and both films and television programmes are often made or marred by the quality of the dialogue or commentary that goes with them.

A good reader, therefore, has many qualities to cultivate, though it may seem somewhat disconcerting to be told that the first principle to be observed is to read sense. Though reading to oneself a passage will often convey meaning and beauty, it is surprising how it may lose all coherence of thought when spoken. Chapter III has already pointed out one pitfall—a lack of good phrasing—Chapter V showed how monotony or wrong emphasis or inflections not only rob a sentence of beauty but destroy its meaning. These technicalities need to be mastered, so that ultimately they become a sub-conscious mechanism which leaves the mind free to draw the most out of the words themselves—only then can we read or speak verse intelligibly.

Therefore it is not difficult to realize that the works of the greatest authors are the easi-

est to read aloud. This is due, partly to the fitness of the words they choose and partly to a rhythm which pulses through their work ; so that in the finest writings, whether poetry or prose, the stress will automatically fall on the right word. Sense, sound and rhythm by the very impetus of their agreement, will carry us along to fulfilment, satisfying we know not what vague desires of beauty.

The simplest way to understand this is to study a few examples—"Cargoes" by John Masefield, and then three short prose extracts—remarking how the beauty lies in the words themselves—sense, sound and rhythm—and how the atmosphere is produced, whether in prose or verse, by the arrangement and choice of words.

" CARGOES "

Quinquireme of Nineveh from distant Ophir
 Rowing home to haven in sunny Palestine
 With a cargo of ivory
 And apes and peacocks,
 Sandalwood, cedarwood, and sweet white
 wine.

Stately Spanish galleon coming from the
Isthmus,

Dipping through the Tropics by the palm-
green shores

With a cargo of diamonds,
Emeralds, amethysts,
Topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores.

Dirty British coaster with salt-caked smoke
stack,

Butting through the channel in the mad
March days

With a cargo of Tyne coal,
Road rails, pig lead,
Firewood, ironware, and cheap tin trays.

Each verse brings before our imagination a distinct yet different picture. In the first the pace is slow and even, as the movement of the rowers. The long vowels, the repeated "n," "m" and sustained "s" sounds give richness; the pulse of the rhythm seems lazily regular as the dip of the long Phœnician oars, with the soft swish as they leave the water

and the boat glides forward: "Sandalwood, cedarwood and sweet white wine."

The second verse has the swifter movement of the sailing vessel. One feels the curtsying dip of this "stately Spanish galleon," sails bellying before the Trade Winds, as she meets the lift of the waves. Her cargo glitters with its antithetical array of long-drawn "m's" and sharp "d's" and "t's"; "diamonds, emeralds, amethysts, topazes," in a phosphorescent tropical sea.

The third verse has the jarring force of the steam coaster: quick, harsh, fighting. There are no long-drawn vowels or consonants to give richness of colour, but the sharp grating "s, t, d, k," and short-clipped vowels, giving a realistic picture of the blustering salt-laden wind, the grey sea, the still battle against cold, wind and weather, fought for the hardly-won riches of British commerce: "Road rails, pig lead and cheap tin trays."

Rhythmically the four strong beats become more emphatic with each verse, until we reach the deliberate harshness of the third. The

definite falling rhythm with each verse begins being held up by the sudden change into the rising movement of the two-stress lines, and the three level beats of "sweet white wine," "palm green shores," and "mad March days." The first giving the idea of a leisurely homecoming, the second a solid richness of colour in contrast to the movement of the ship, the third, which is repeated also in "cheap tin trays," but adding to the jar of battle.

In prose we shall find pictures as vivid, and words as right-sounding as in poetry. The last verse of Masfield's poem may be compared with the opening sentences of an essay by George Santayana, "War"*

"To fight is a radical instinct ; if men have nothing else to fight over they will fight over words, fancies, or women, or they will fight because they dislike each other's looks, or because they have met walking in opposite directions. To knock a thing

**Essays of To-day*, Harrap Library.

down, especially if it is cocked at an arrogant angle, is a deep delight to the blood."

The recurring "t, s, k" sounds give the same harsh power that we felt in the "Dirty British coaster with the salt-caked smoke stack," and show an aspect of the English language that is not possible in the lighter French or mellower Italian speech.

In the scintillating beauty of this description of Niagara Falls in the essay by Rupert Brooke,* we find the same shifting arrangement of long-drawn vowels and sharp consonants as in the Spanish cargo of gems:

"Half a mile or so above the Falls, on either side, the water of the great stream begins to run more swiftly and in confusion. It descends with an ever-growing speed. It begins chattering and leaping, breaking into a thousand ripples, throwing up joyful fingers of spray"

*Ibid.

and so through a whole paragraph till we reach the climax:

“Leaping in the sunlight, careless, entwining, clamorously joyful, the waves riot on towards the verge.”

Lastly, though differing in period and scene, the long, slow-sounded words describing Uffdown Manor (Portrait of Clare by Francis Brett Young) give the same serenity though not the same sanlit clarity, that we found in the first verse of “Cargoes.”

“ The house stood as it had been built, the creation of a wise and cultured taste ; and the trees that sheltered it, chestnut, elm and sycamore, had kept their distance, as though respecting its integrity, leaving it to emerge alone and unsullied from lawns as smooth as water. From every line of it there breathed an air of peace, of benevolence, of wise and settled happiness.”

To appreciate to the full the quality of these brief extracts, we must read them aloud,

and let the imagination paint them for us in all their beauty. Appreciation is the first step in overcoming our defects; if therefore we can bring an appreciation of beautiful language into our lives it cannot but result in a rebellion against all that is ugly in tone or defective in speech. Every human being has some conception of beauty, though many disguise it with a pose of self-centred indifference. Eagerly or with reluctance each will recognise beauty in some form or other, consciously or unconsciously each will react to it, and find in developing this desire for beauty his fullest self-expression.

CHAPTER VIII

GESTURE

GESTURE is largely a matter of temperament, and so varies according to nationality, place and period. Not unlike dress it seems to follow cycles of fashion. A clue to the spirit of the age is generally to be found in its dress, its dances and its plays. When Shakespeare lived we imagine that gestures were broad and definite; a man was not ashamed of showing his feelings, nor did he cloak them with artificiality as in the more sophisticated eighteenth century. There we find that gestures had become complex, even grotesque; the right use of the snuff box, the handkerchief and the fan had developed into the detailed perfection of a fine art.

The stage which "holds a mirror up to nature" has on the whole faithfully depicted the spirit of the time. As we look back

through the history of the English drama, from the simple religious pageant, through masque to poetic tragedy, through the scurrilous drama of the seventeenth century, and the mannered comedies of the eighteenth century, through the more sober and sentimental plays of the last century, down to the "thrillers" and sex dramas of to-day, we glimpse, as it were, a series of cameo pictures each different, each typical of its time, each showing subtle changes of gesture.

The modern actor uses the minimum of gesture. Now, in plays which aim more at psychological correctness than dramatic incident, to depict the mental state of a character is of the first importance. This limitation of gesture to the essential is akin to the impressionism in painting. In place of the detailed and rather stereotyped gestures in vogue during the last century, we find subtle shades of movement and facial expression which leave more to the intuition of the audience. Instead of the emphatic gestures we read in

stage directions of fifty years ago, more is left to the individuality of the actor. Indeed the pendulum may be said to have swung to the other extreme, for the cult of naturalness has developed, in many cases, into a habit of "walking through a part" with a nonchalance verging on boredom.

Among reciters, however, the cutting down of gesture has been to the good. It is no longer considered good style literally to suit the action to the word. With the revival of an interest in poetry, the dramatic ballad becomes yearly more rare, and lyrics, odes and sonnets, in which gestures would be quite out of place, are being spoken for the beauty of the verse alone. It will be interesting to note whether, in the cycle of time, community singing will lead to the rebirth of the ballad; and if so, whether the universal study of psychology will prohibit a return to that superabundance of gesture such as our grandfathers knew.

In these days Hamlet's advice to players, "Do not saw the air with your hands thus,"

is hardly necessary. Among dramatic students it is most rare to find one who over-gesticulates; rather, the modern student remains stiff and immovable and is apt to regard walking across the stage as a desperate venture. The ideal of every actor is to give the impression of naturalness and ease, but to do this it is essential that the ability to move be not lacking. There is something to be said in favour of the old elocution professors who taught their classes gesture by rote—"walk six paces and make a gesture of dismissal with the left hand"—and so on, rather in the manner of the gymnast. For though the method was stilted, the very familiarity of the stereotyped gesture making it ridiculous, it gave a certain broad freedom of movement to those who were able to rise above the letter to the spirit.

Gesture for the sake of gesture is against all modern tendencies ; it should be an accompaniment which gives point and greater subtlety of meaning to the words. The aim of the actor or orator is to give an appearance

of spontaneity in gesture as in speech. That the speech has been prepared does not detract from its appeal, similarly that the gesture has been prepared should not take from its apparent naturalness. As we shall see in the following chapter, the proper use of gesture is but part of that studied mechanism which produces the effect of perfect naturalness.

In the study of gesture this idea of a perfected mechanism should be remembered. The beginner, as a rule, is stiff, so the first lesson must be to relax ; to be able to stand, to walk, to sit, to turn easily and with grace. Movements, unless the character portrayed is nervous or awkward, should be slow and broad—that is, not a hurried, cramped gesture from the elbow, but a definite movement of the whole arm. Nervousness makes the beginner half-hearted ; should he have succeeded in raising his arm he will quickly drop it again, whereas to hold a gesture through a pause is often most effective. The following instance may serve as an illustration of the power of a sustained gesture. It was a Satur-

day night in a provincial music-hall. The audience were very rowdy, and when the turn came for a dramatic sketch there seemed no hope of order being restored. After a wait the first few lines of the sketch were spoken, but it was obvious that the words could not possibly be heard above the clamour. An actor who was taking the part of an old priest at length came down to the footlights and raised his hand. He kept it thus raised until bit by bit silence fell upon the theatre, then, when all was quiet, he made a short appeal for order and the sketch was performed without any further interruptions.

At such a moment the full value of whole-heartedness in a gesture is realised. It is true that this gesture was quite unstudied and spontaneous, but it requires the finished artist to rely on the impulse of the moment. Many excellent "gags" often creep into a play during the course of its run; the twitch of a skirt, or a glance which may have been almost an accident in the first instance, remains as part of the recognised business of

the scene. But the experienced actor will be the first to admit that such gestures are indeed on the impulse of the moment and not to be relied upon. One can have no sympathy for the amateur who, while being persistently bad at rehearsals, declares that "it will be all right on the night." It is when faced with the emotional nervousness of a first performance that the studied effect and the practised gesture give the only solid foundation.

Another fact to be remembered in studying gesture, especially in strongly emotional parts, is the power of restraint. Just as over-emphasis in speech kills the sense and defeats its own ends, so to over-gesticulate will turn pathos into farce. To clasp one's heart at the word love, or to point upwards at every mention of heaven is obviously ludicrous. As has been seen above, gesture for gesture's sake is against all modern ideals of naturalness. Now that we are, on the whole, more open with each other, for all our dread of displaying emotion, and now that a more widespread study of psychology tells us the

whys and wherefores of our emotional reactions, we may more easily study others at times of great joy or great sorrow. We shall soon realize that strong emotion tends to quietness and restraint, rather than to noise and movement. At such times, we often find that the incomplete, almost discordant gesture and the jarring tone will be most true to life.

The key to gesture, therefore, as to all artistic expression, is a submergence of self into the part. The actor should study the whole play and then his part as an essential development of the plot. Certain students find it helpful to rehearse the movements of a scene without the words, rather as though acting for the silent films, thus meaningless and needless gestures are eliminated. This may be done with or without a mirror as the individual prefers. Some students find the mirror an asset, while with others it only emphasises their self-consciousness. The ideal in gesture is for the actor so to be one with the atmosphere and environment of the play that his movements will become part of his acting,

one with his whole conception of the character he portrays. His gestures will then come spontaneously, and be modified afterwards by training and experience to give the effect of perfect naturalness.

Much of this chapter has seemed applicable only to the actor, but it may be applied with equal force to the orator or the preacher. A superabundance of gesture will kill the most reasonable argument ; a stilted, constantly repeated gesture may be so irritating as to become an obsession to the spectator, who will cease even to hear the words spoken. Many instances of these faults will readily come to one's mind ; if not, we have only to visit one of the London parks and listen to the many speakers, who by wildness of gesture try to cloak the weakness of their argument. We shall have an object lesson in restraint. A single gesture at the climax of a speech will be far more effective than a multiplicity of movement throughout.

CHAPTER IX

HOW TO TRAIN FOR THE STAGE

How to prepare for success on the modern stage is perhaps one of the most difficult problems. To the majority of those who have to earn their livelihood, and who, to use the old-fashioned phrase, are "stage-struck," one might say "get over it." The theatrical profession is overcrowded. Society and Finance have taken up the stage, and the old order changeth.

Yet to be "stage-struck" is perhaps a natural enough state, since acting is a natural art. In a certain sense people may be said to act all their lives, from the time when the little boy puffs along the road as an "engine," till old age poses as an oracle.

For acting is but the grown-up game of "let's pretend," though in the theatre the player must bewitch the audience as well as

himself. Why then cannot every one be a great actor? It is the fault of the audience. From that fatal day when the child realizes that someone is watching, and criticising, the game of pretence does not quite ring true. Self-consciousness has crept in—the fear of appearing a fool—and though the pretence will continue, inevitably, there is never the same naïve whole-heartedness; we are uneasily conscious of an insincerity. This perhaps might suggest that members of the theatrical profession are immune from self-consciousness—when we know them to be just as self-conscious as the rest of us, often more so. I think it is that if they are really great they have the imagination and sympathy which enable them to get outside themselves and into the part; hence readily to share the game with the audience.

This power to share may be what is implied in the term “a born actor,” yet even so the game of acting has many rules, technicalities and requirements, so that without training even a born actor will not go far.

. Many years ago, when the reign of the old actor-manager was at its height, this technical training was given to the beginner by the manager himself. The aspiring young actor was given a three-seasons engagement, and it was therefore to the advantage of the manager to school him in his parts. This gave a sound and complete training. It was considered then that a fine artist should be able to play any part. The talk was not of his unsuitability to a part, but his capacity or incapacity to act it. This capacity to play any part is just as necessary to-day, though the unfortunate tendency to condemn an actor to one type of character, in which he has been successful, is destructive of all personal enterprise.

It may be the superabundance of players, now that the stage has become fashionable, that has brought about the short engagements. This makes it more necessary than ever for the beginner to have a firm basis of technical knowledge and experience. The need has been met in recent years by the establishing of a number of Dramatic Schools, and an increase in the

number of teachers of stagecraft and elocution. The student is thus able to study and rehearse a greater variety of parts than would otherwise be practicable, and so acquires a naturalness and ease which only come from perfected mechanism ; a perfection which experience and practice alone can bring. The great difference between the performance of an amateur and a professional actor is that in the former the mechanism is apparent, while in the latter it is so perfect as to appear naturalness.

The theatre is a thoroughly unnatural environment ; it is the artistry which makes the emotions portrayed seem natural. The true emotion of love seldom calls forth the beauty of poetry such as we find in Romeo's speeches, the real lover is often banal ; similarly real anger frequently degenerates into vulgar abuse, whereas with what flow of scorn does not Brutus denounce Cassius. Yet with all this, to convey an atmosphere of probability and naturalness is the ideal of every actor. To do this, technical knowledge and experience are essential. It is not enough for the actor

to feel his part, he must be able to portray it to the audience ; it is not enough for the actor to lose himself in the part, the audience must lose themselves too. For, however intensely an actor mentally " lives " his part, if his speech is inaudible, his movements muddled, his gestures cramped and indefinite, then, unless some other motive restrains, the audience will leave the theatre. It will be of little avail to blame them, for, after all, the audience have paid for their share in the game. Curiously enough, this consideration for the audience is one of the hardest facts to make the dramatic student realize—that the player is the servant of the public, and not the public the servant of any man or woman who wants to " show off."

What then are the essentials of successful acting which training will help us to acquire ? To begin with, the business of the actor is to portray a certain character through speaking certain words and doing certain actions. Primarily the audience therefore must hear and understand all that is said. Their artistic

sense should not be offended by mis-pronunciations or by Cockney or other dialects, unless it is a dialect part. There should be no need to strain to catch words or sentences, nor should the actor speak too quickly. A pause is of great use and effect, and though the wait may seem interminable to the actor, from the audience's point of view it may be imperceptible. In the same way to move too quickly, jerkily or stiffly tends to destroy the illusion of the play. The actor must be able to look at ease, to move gracefully, to walk naturally about the stage without interfering with the other characters, to stay in one position during another actor's speech without fidgeting. It is pitiful to see a pretty amateur looking a mere gawk upon the stage, or moving about like the proverbial cat on hot bricks.

Such apparent trifles as the right pitch or inflection in speech, or the correct hand movement in gesture may appear of no importance, but experience proves that they will make or spoil a part. Many an actor is remembered for his speaking of a phrase, many a comedian

makes the audience laugh by a single gesture.

The cause and cure of the inaudible and monotonous voice have been discussed in the earlier chapters of this book: gesture and movement have been treated rather fully in Chapter VIII; but with a view to stage training it may be well to add here a tribute to the benefit many students have derived from a short course of Greek Dancing or Miming. In many instances students who protested that their hands were "terribly in the way," found such a course, where gesture is the only form of expression, of incalculable help.

The next essential to consider is the actual portrayal of the character. The lack of imaginative sympathy which prevents an actor from submerging himself adequately in the part is largely overcome by experience. It is true to say that every new part learned, every new character depicted is another step on the ladder of artistic development which leads to success. The chorus-girl will be the better for having studied Shakespeare's hero-

ines. Indeed, the study of parts, which one may never be called upon to play, is far from being a waste of energy, for it lays that strong foundation of knowledge and assurance upon which the lighter work can be built. Light work must have a depth behind it or it will be only froth. Often the young actor fails just at that critical moment in a play where he has his chance ; the opportunity for " the little bit of emotion," in short that moment which makes the part and the play. Should the actor fail then, no amount of lightness and sparkle and charm will retrieve his success.

Only by comprehensive and varied study of parts does an actor learn to get his effects whether in tragedy or comedy ; and such a study will be especially profitable under the critical guidance of a teacher who gives individual attention to each student, and who has personal experience of acting. All art is essentially individualistic and one personal tussle with a big part such as " Nina " in " His House in Order " by Pinero, or Oscar Wilde's " Duchess of Padua," will achieve

more than the most careful study of another's efforts, or many years' experience of "walking-on."

It is true to say that a charming personality is the greatest asset. To have training without personality may pass muster, but to have personality without training is to waste a precious gift. A charm of personality with training is the key to success. Not every part is a good part, but an experienced and competent actor will be able to make the most of poor material, while, on the other hand, the initiated spectator will often see what is known in the profession as an actor-proof part passing with the uninitiated as a fine bit of acting, whereas he knows that if the part were really well played, the actor's success would have been overwhelming. For an example of this we may look back at Meggie Albanesi's performance of Sidney in the "Bill of Divorcement." Although this was a magnificent part, it was undoubtedly training on top of her natural ability that allowed Miss Albanesi to show that restraint in her display of emo-

tion, that slight gesture or turn of her body, which made her live the part when even not in the centre of the stage. It made her acting irresistible, and caused her to give that unforgettable performance which placed her in the forefront of her profession.

It is an interesting point to notice that three of my mother's pupils have played in this clever play of Clemence Dane's at various places and have sent us the Press criticisms. In one, the critic spoke of it as being a play depicting the intense emotional struggle of the mother between her love and what she feels may be her duty. Sidney, Miss Albanesi's part, was hardly mentioned. On another occasion the part of the father was stressed. And on yet another occasion the girl playing the part of Sidney again swept all before her. It is interesting to see how the balance of a play containing three such strong parts can be so affected by the ability and sincerity of the actors.

CHAPTER X

HINTS ON VOICE TRAINING EXERCISES

WHEN writing a chapter on voice training exercises, the danger lies in the desire to make sweeping statements, and to form cut and dried rules for the average student. As every teacher knows, the "average" student does not exist. Each one has different faults, different qualities, different aptitudes and capabilities ; therefore each will have different needs.

In the study of elocution, which, perhaps, in an especial degree requires individual training, mass teaching and big classes cannot give the best results. The aim of the teacher of elocution should be, firstly, to enable the student to gain power, music and expression in his speaking voice with the least possible effort, and then to aid him to find self-expression and

naturalness, in harmony with his temperament and capabilities.

As has been shown in the foregoing chapters, speech faults may be grouped under three headings—faulty breathing, faulty diction, faulty tone. It is probable that a student will fail in a greater or less degree in all three. For instance, if the breath control is slack, the tone will be thin and jerky, while there are few whose pronunciation and diction may be said to be perfect. Therefore, while there can be no hard and fast scheme of study applicable to every student, certain exercises, scenes and speeches may be practised for a variety of defects, and so will be useful to many.

As an example of such an exercise, we may consider Edgar Allan Poe's well-known poem "The Bells," and see how in the study of it many of the most common speech faults may be overcome. When spoken by a reciter with a powerful and melodious voice, this poem can be most moving and dramatic; but it is by no means easy, and its very intricacies and articulation and variation of tone and rate make it a

splendid exercise for many who would never be able to recite it in public.

By an arrangement of long and short lines and by his choice of words, Poe has conveyed in this poem the sound of the bells—sledge bells, wedding bells, the fire alarm, the passing bell. Therefore the reciter must endeavour, by change of tone, pitch, and pace, to convey the different sounds, so that the effect on the listener is to hear the tinkling, chiming, clanging, or tolling, rather than to follow the literal sense of the words.

On the other hand, the words themselves must be articulated carefully and clearly, the most being made of their tone-colour and imaginative association.

This in itself is an excellent study for gaining variety, power and resonance; while the difficult arrangement of the consonant articulations, together with the rapidity of speech required in certain passages, will, if practised conscientiously, give ease, firmness and flexibility to the organs of articulation.

In the first verse we hear the sledge bells

This verse is, I consider, the most difficult for the student to tackle, and gains by being studied between the third and fourth verses—that is between the alarm bell and the funeral bell. Always let it be remembered that this study of “The Bells” is primarily an exercise. Thus the first verse should be taken as a study in clear articulation. The tone should be light, the words clear-cut and delicate and placed well forward on the lips.

The pace of the verse is quick, but it is well to study slowly at first such lines as, “What a world of merriment their melody foretells” and “To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells,” so that every syllable is clear and distinct.

Such consonant combinations as “from the,” “with the,” “while the,” will often be stumbling blocks. In all the verses the repeated “ll” sound, unless carefully practised, will tend to become “eu,” “beu,” instead of “bell,” especially when rapidly repeated, as at the end of the first verse.

I

Hear the sledges with the bells—
 Silver bells !
 What a world of merriment their melody foretells !
 How they tinkle, tinkle, tinkle
 In the icy air of night !
 While the stars that oversprinkle
 All the heavens seem to twinkle
 With a crystalene delight ;
 Keeping time, time, time
 In a sort of Runic rhyme,
 To the tintinnabulation that so musically wells
 From the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
 From the jingling and the tinkling of the bells.

In the second verse we hear the wedding peal. A careful study of this verse will do much to soften the voice and make the tone mellow and full.

Though the pace is medium, the long-drawn “ m ” and “ n ” sounds, and the lingering legato, will require a steady control of the breath, for the danger in this verse is to become breathless and jerky.

The harmony of the whole is given by the round and sustained vowel sounds : “ mellow,” “ molten-golden notes,” “ tune,” “ moon,” and so on ; any badly shaped vowels

or Cockney intonations will be apparent immediately.

The wedding bells should be regarded as a musical peal, rhyming and chiming, swinging and ringing, delightful to listen to, and a direct contrast to the alarm bell in the subsequent verse. In all the verses, the repetition of "bells, bells, bells" in the last lines should be treated as the climax of the whole. Thus in the second verse the best effect is obtained by the suggestion of a chime, letting the variations of tone descend a scale, almost as in singing.

II

Hear the mellow wedding bells,
 Golden bells !
 What a world of happiness their harmony foretells !
 Through the balmy air of night
 How they ring out their delight !
 From the molten-golden notes,
 And all in tune,
 What a liquid ditty floats
 To the turtle dove that listens, while she gloats
 On the moon !
 Oh, from out the sounding cells,
 What a gush of euphony voluminously wells,
 How it swells !

How it dwells
 On the Future! How it tells
 Of the rapture that impels,
 To the swinging and the ringing
 Of the bells, bells, bells,
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,
 Bells, bells, bells—
 To the rhyming and the chiming of the bells!

In the third verse, in order to suggest the brazen alarm bell, the tone must be hard and metallic. The resonance should be well forward in the mouth and "face-mask." On no account should a nasal tone be used (which is really produced at the back of the nose in the throat), but the nasal and head resonances should be freely used and developed.

The student must not be afraid of letting the tone appear hard and ugly at times. . . . "Too much horrified to speak, they can only shriek, shriek out of tune."

This verse will do much to strengthen the organs of articulation. The hard consonants t, d, b, should be articulated firmly and emphatically; this, in conjunction with other exercises for strengthening the tongue, will greatly aid in the study of verse one. The

pace of this verse should be quicker and more varied than that of the wedding bells, and there is more opportunity for imaginative expression.

III

Hear the loud alarm bells—
 Brazen bells !
 What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells !
 In the startled ear of night
 How they scream out their affright !
 Too much horrified to speak,
 They can only shriek, shriek
 Out of tune,
 In a clamorous appealing to the mercy of the fire,
 In a mad expostulation with the deaf and frantic
 fire.
 Leaping higher, higher, higher,
 With a desperate desire,
 And a resolute endeavour
 Now—now to sit or never,
 By the side of the pale-faced moon.
 Oh, the bells, bells, bells !
 What a tale their terror tells
 Of despair !
 How they clang, and crash, and roar !
 What a horror they outpour
 On the bosom of the palpitating air !
 Yet the ear it fully knows,
 By the twanging,
 And the clanging,
 How the danger ebbs and flows :
 Yet the ear distinctly tells,
 In the jangling
 And the wrangling,
 How the danger sinks and swells,

By the sinking and the swelling in the anger of the
bells—

Of the bells—

Of the bells, bells, bells, bells,

Bells, bells, bells—

In the clamour and the clangour of the bells!

The fourth verse, depicting the passing bell, should be taken very slowly, the tones being deep and prolonged and all possible resonance being obtained. In some respects this is the easiest of all the verses to recite. The effect depends largely on the power and depth of voice, and the imagination of the reciter.

During a recent visit to Belgium, I had the opportunity of hearing Chopin's Funeral March played on the carillon at Ghent. The effect of the heavy, stumbling chords, rhythmical, yet not truly in time, now fading as the wind caught the sound, now overwhelmingly near, seemed to catch one by the throat and convey all and more than all that Edgar Allan Poe has depicted in the last verse of this poem.

IV

Hear the tolling of the bells—

Iron bells !

What a world of solemn thought their monody
compels !

In the silence of the night,

How we shiver with affright

At the melancholy menace of their tone !

For every sound that floats

From the rust within their throats

Is a groan.

And the people—ah, the people—

They that dwell up in the steeple,

All alone,

And who, tolling, tolling, tolling

In that muffled monotone

Feel a glory in so rolling

On the human heart a stone—

They are neither man nor woman—

They are neither brute nor human--

They are ghouls :

And their king it is who tolls ;

And he rolls, rolls, rolls,

Rolls

A pæan from the bells !

And his merry bosom swells

With the pæan of the bells !

And he dances and he yells—

Keeping time, time, time,

In a sort of Runic rhyme.

To the pæan of the bells—

Of the bells.

Keeping time, time, time

In a sort of Runic rhyme,

To the throbbing of the bells—

Of the bells, bells, bells—

To the sobbing of the bells ;

Keeping time, time, time
 As he knells, knells, knells
 In a happy Runic rhyme,
 To the rolling of the bells—
 Of the bells, bells, bells—
 To the tolling of the bells,
 Of the bells, bells, bells, bells
 Bells, bells, bells—
 To the moaning and the groaning of the bells.

The study and practice of such a poem as this nearly always ensures a notable improvement in a student's voice, which is enriched both in tone-quality and flexibility. Though only learnt as an exercise, "The Bells" should be delivered with expression and vigour, until, when thoroughly mastered, the final verse becomes without any strain of voice a big emotional effect.

Other verses and speeches will prove of like value as exercises; for example, "The Song of the Guns," by Herbert Kaufman, which is the same type of poem as "The Bells."

D'Artagnan's description of his ride, in Henry Hamilton's play of "The Three Musketeers," gives vigour and tone. Rosalind's speech in "As You Like It," Act III, scene 3,

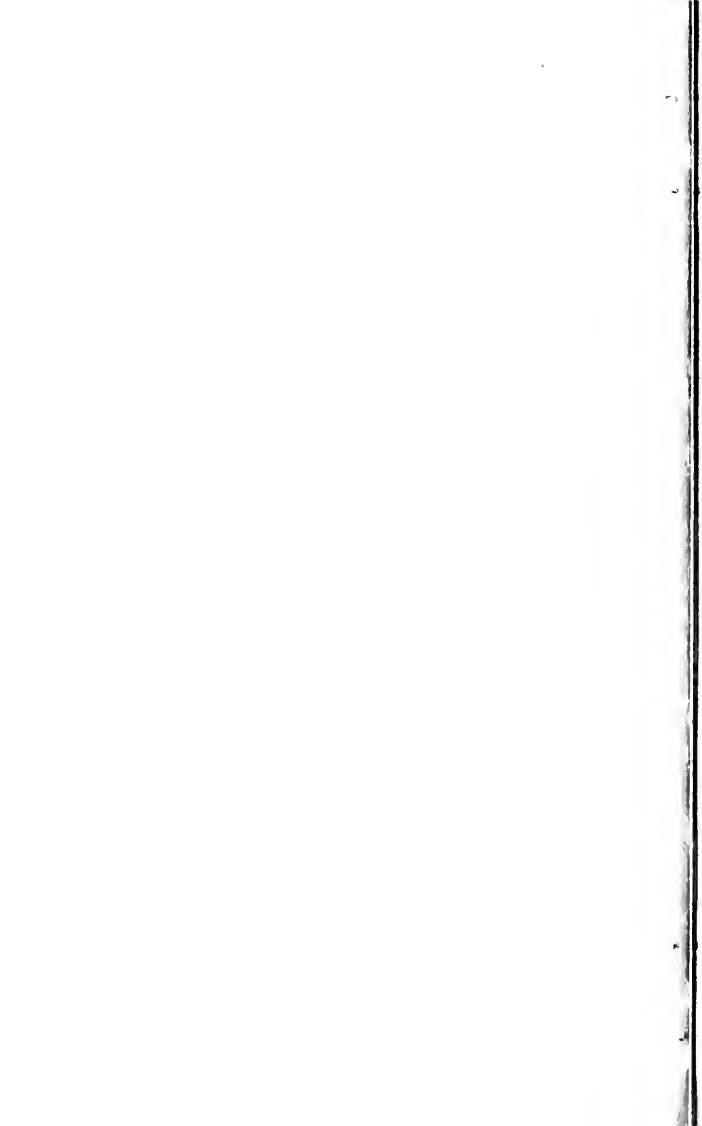
"Love is merely a madness" to ". . . . there shall not be a spot of love in 't," is an exercise in lightness and flexibility. Scenes from old comedy are helpful for movement and gesture.

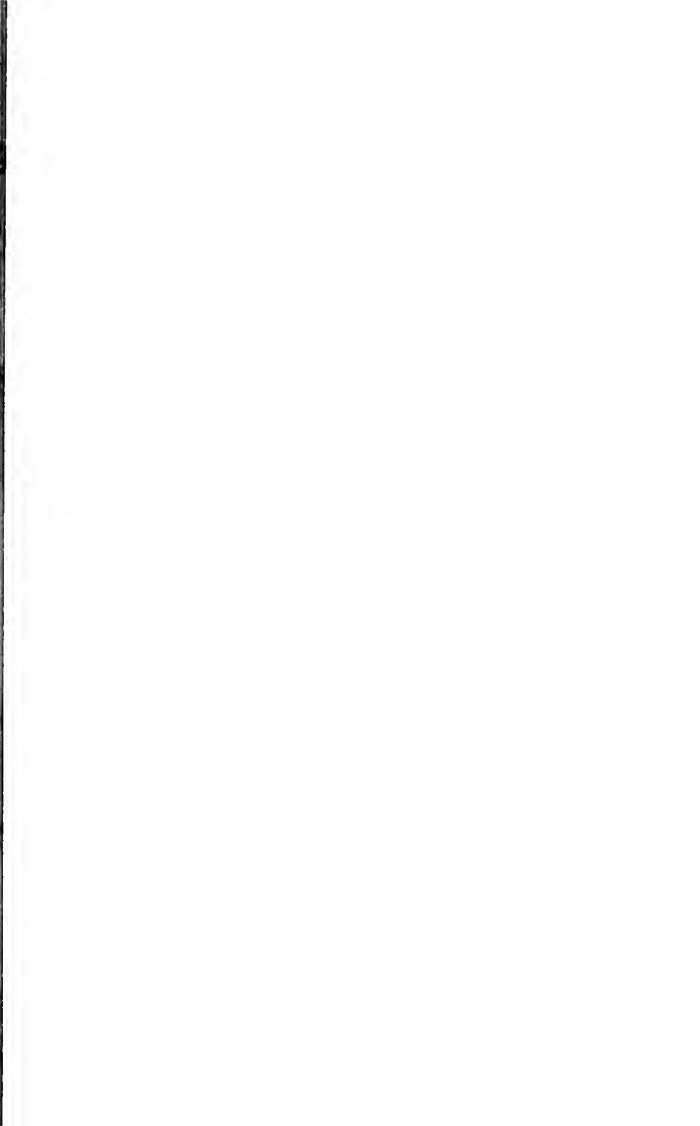
But it must be remembered that these are only preliminary exercises. The second part of the teacher's work is to study individual requirements. It would be obviously useless to develop the same scheme of work for an actor, a clergyman, and a scientific lecturer. Yet actor, preacher, and lecturer have this in common, that they will need exercises in order to gain power, control and flexibility of voice. It is for this that such verses as "The Bells" may be used with advantage by each one. Apart from their interest to the student, they will prove valuable as studies in expression, and a far keener spur to progress than the lists of meaningless sounds and phrases which form the majority of exercises for tone and speech.

In conclusion, I cannot do better than reiterate what has already been written in

Chapter I: the ultimate improvement rests with the student. No scheme of work can succeed unless the student co-operates by constant practice and a sincere desire to overcome difficulties and faults.

Practise! Practise! Practise! . . . Success chiefly depends on our own efforts.







UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA

001 426 215



3 1210 00410 5449

